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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002449

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SUBJECT: SUBJECT: URUZGAN STRONGMAN ACCEPTS KABUL OFFER TO
COMMAND HIGHWAY PATROL KANDAK

Classified By: Acting DCM James Van Laningham for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Former Provincial highway police (then known as Kandak Amniat-e Uruzgan (KAU)) commander Matiullah Khan said in an August 23 meeting that he accepted the recent offer by Karzai and Ministry of the Interior (MOI) head Moqbel to lead a police patrol kandak responsible for highway security in Uruzgan Province of 640 patrolmen that would report directly to the Regional Chief of Police. After the disbandment of KAU, Khan operated as the de facto highway security force, but his official status was unclear. Khan and approximately 350 of his patrolmen were registered as part of Provincial Chief of Police Ghul's ANP tashkil, but Ghul admitted that Khan was a subordinate in name only. Khan said the new configuration tracked more closely with the situation on the ground. However, Khan's unparalleled wealth and reputation as an effective counterinsurgent have made him an even more valuable target for the Taliban and, ironically, may have put serious strains on his relationship with uncle and former mentor, Jan Mohammad Khan (JMK). The relatively young Khan has grown as an undeniable force in Uruzgan, but even his supporters acknowledge that strongmen like Khan cannot and should not figure in a stable and democratic Afghanistan. End summary.

Highway Police Matiullah Khan Gets Promoted (

¶2. (C) In an August 23 meeting with PRTOFF, highway security commander Matiullah Khan confirmed that Kabul authorized Uruzgan a police patrol kandak responsible for highway security of 640 patrolmen that would report directly to the Regional Chief of Police (RCoP) General Wahdat. Following the dissolution of the Afghan Highway Police (KAU), the MOI nominally placed Khan and 350 MOI-registered highway patrolmen in Uruzgan under the authority of Provincial Chief of Police (PCoP) Jumma Ghul. (Note: Khan reportedly has at least 1,000 more patrolmen working for him but are not registered or paid by MOI.) Khan admitted) and Ghul confirmed) that the chain of command was ambiguous at best and suggested that the new configuration tracked more closely with reality and was recognition of the fact that he is the only effective security force in the province.

¶3. (C) Prior to Khan's recent promotion, President Karzai and MOI Minister Moqbel had summoned Khan, Governor Hamdam, Ghul, ANA Provincial Commander General Hafizuddin, and former

Uruzgan governor and de facto power broker Jan Mohammad Khan (JMK) to discuss Matiullah Khan,s future. Governor Hamdam and Ghul told PRT Tarin Kowt in separate conversations that Karzai and MOI were making a last-ditch effort to exert some control over Khan,s operations, while acknowledging his &elevation in stature and penchant for independence.⁸ The provincial security leaders all cast serious doubt on Khan,s willingness to submit to the RCoP,s command. The consensus here is that Khan, who is widely respected for his operations against insurgents and his strong support for Karzai, will continue to be viewed in Kabul as a &force for good,⁸ in spite of his reputation as a ruthless thief and killer. Khan is by far the wealthiest man in the province, reportedly earning USD 500,000 - 650,000 per month for providing security on the Tarin Kowt-Kandahar highway to businesses and NGOs, and will continue to operate outside the MOI chain of command.

(But at What Price?

¶4. (C) Khan,s meteoric rise in prominence and stature has not come without cost. Taliban attacks against Khan have intensified in recent days. Khan excused himself from the August 23 meeting when he had received a tip that a suicide bomber was planning to kill him and/or members of his family that same evening. Only one hour after our meeting, Khan told us that the suicide bomber approached his compound (located 1000 meters away from the PRT), but his security forces shot the attacker before he reached the compound gate. The attacker managed to detonate the bomb but was not within

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blast range of the compound; there were no reported casualties other than the attacker.

¶5. (C) Moreover, Khan,s wealth and political independence have possibly created fissures in his relationship with his uncle and mentor JMK. Hamdam, who maintains contact with JMK and Khan, told the PRT that 38 year-old Khan no longer considers himself a follower of JMK; they are now equals. Khan also told Hamdam that he believes JMK in the past took advantage of Khan,s &youth and immaturity⁸ to wage war against JMK,s enemies in the Ghilzai tribe (JMK and Khan are Populzai). As a result, Hamdam claimed, Khan has put some distance between JMK and himself.

¶6. (C) PCoP Ghul, who continues to follow JMK,s lead, also claimed that Khan and JMK are no longer as close as they used to be, but Ghul blamed Khan,s greed and intent on strengthening his direct ties to Karzai and other national leaders in an effort to usurp JMK as the sole de facto leader of Uruzgan. For example, Ghul reported that only days ago Khan received directly from the MOI ten RPG launchers, 308 RPG rounds, and 27 Ford Ranger trucks, while Ghul received only ten RPG launchers, 54 RPG rounds, and eight Ranger trucks for the entire province.

¶7. (C) Ghul reminded us that Khan had been offered several key positions in the province, including ANA kandak commander, but he turned them all down. Although Khan has given his consent to this latest offer, Ghul predicted that Khan ultimately would continue to operate outside the law.

Comment

¶8. (C) Most political and security leaders in the province applaud Kabul,s effort to establish greater control over Khan,s illegal highway patrol, but few doubt that Khan will drop his loyalty to Kabul if and when his business and political interests diverge from those of Kabul. Khan is clearly a shrewd (if not unscrupulous) businessman and works closely with Coalition Forces to disrupt Taliban operations. However, even Khan,s supporters, such as Hamdam, acknowledge that such strongmen (including JMK) cannot and should not

play a prominent role in Afghanistan,s political future.
WOOD